

Children's Court christened new families on National Adoption Day

After more than two years of being their foster parents, Leslie & Matthew McDonough recently were legally deemed mom and dad to soon-to-be three-year-old twin girls Selena Grace and Teresa Joy.

Judge Catherine Begaye presided over the adoption hearing on November 19, 2021. It was one of 19 adoption hearings held that day, as the Court commemorated National Adoption Day. In total, 26 children were welcomed into their new forever families during this annual celebration.

The Court's ongoing COVID protocols dictated that the hearings be held virtually. As a result, the day started with the families receiving a video in which all of the Children's Court Judges as well as New Mexico Children Youth and Families Department Secretary Barbara Vigil offered congratulations and well wishes on this special day.

Chief Judge Marie Ward noted that a coalition of organizations—including the Alliance for Children's Rights, Children's Action Network, Freddie Mac Foundation, and Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption—started National Adoption Day 22 years ago to draw attention to the number of children in foster care and awaiting adoption. That number currently stands at roughly 125,000, even though more than 75,000 children have been adopted during National Adoption Day events over the past 22 years.

Chief Judge Ward said CYFD works with the Court as well as organizations such as the Adoption and Foster Care

Alliance, the Adoption Assistance Agency, New Mexico Kids Matter, and many adoption attorneys to make the local Adoption Day event a success.

Honoring 19 new families

"Today, we are celebrating and honoring 19 families welcoming 26 children," Chief Judge Ward added. "But this also is a celebration of all the forever homes created this year. Since last year's National Adoption Day, we have celebrated 162 families adopting 246 children, with 151 of those amazing children leaving foster care for their forever homes."

While Adoption Day hearings were conducted virtually, the families' joy over the occasion was no less real.

For instance, friends and extended family logged into the McDonough's hearing, expressing happiness and gratitude at the twins becoming part of the family.

"It has been that way since we first brought the girls home," Leslie McDonough said. "Our whole family has been very supportive. That has made things easier."

The girls also have two other welcoming siblings, five-year-old Nathan and four-year-old William. "They don't really understand the concept of fostering and adoption," Matthew McDonough said. "So, to them the girls are just their sisters."

Even though they have two biological children, adding to their family by adoption was a natural choice for the McDonoughs.

"My earliest memory of wanting to do something like that was in kindergarten," Leslie McDonough said. "We had an assembly in which they talked about families hosting kids from other countries. That intrigued me. So, I guess the idea of fostering and



Leslie and Matthew McDonough officially welcomed twin sisters Selena Grace and Teresa Joy to their family on National Adoption Day.

adopting kind of grew from that.”

“When it comes to kids, I just say the more the merrier,” Matthew McDonough added.

Over the eight plus years they have been married, the McDonoughs have taken care of nine foster children, with most of those being short-term fosters destined for other homes. The situation with the twins was different from start.

The girls spent their first few months of life in the Neo-Natal Intensive Care unit before going to a foster family that already had four other children under the age of four. “That mom really tried, but it was too much for her,” Leslie McDonough said. “So, she called CYFD and told them she could not handle that many kids.”

With the twins ten months old at time, CYFD turned to the McDonoughs, who knew almost immediately that this would not be a temporary placement. “We really knew from the moment they came into our home that we wanted to adopt them,” Leslie recalled.

On November 19, 2021, the adoption took place. As twins squirmed on Leslie and Matthews laps, and older brother Nathan watched in the background, Judge Begaye formalized the adoption, officially making Selena Grace and Teresa Joy part of the McDonough family.

“I don’t know what to say other than it is awesome,” Leslie McDonough said, when asked how she feels following the ceremony. “This just puts on stamp on things that says the girls are ours. We have felt that way all along, but now we know if is official, and it feels wonderful.”

Matthew McDonough said he is looking forward to little things like taking the girls to the doctor, and saying, “I am dad, rather than foster dad.” He also wanted to encourage anyone who has considered becoming a foster or adoptive parent to follow through.

“You should at least start the process,” he said. “If you determine later that you don’t want to do it, you can stop, but if you go through with it, I think you will find that it is worth it.”